

CAPTAIN FLETCHER'S INN AND MILL MANAGER'S HOUSE

(Navarro-by-the-Sea Hotel)

River Road off Highway One immediately south of the Navarro River
& Route 128

Albion

Mendocino County

California

HALS CA-41

CA-41

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C Street NW

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Location: River Road off Highway One immediately south of the Navarro River and Route 128, Albion, Mendocino County, CA
Lat: 39.11708 Long: -123.45334

Significance: Captain Fletcher was the first European to settle in this area. He built an inn at this location that was in continuous use for 140 years and at its peak attracted a lively tourist trade including notables like actors Clark Gable and Carole Lombard. The mill that grew up here was part of the Mendocino lumber industry that drove the north coast economy for decades. In 1860 they built the first lumber schooner here which started the ship building industry on the Mendocino coast. The property has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and is on the National Trust's Save America's Treasures list.

Description: The original town of Navarro built up around the Navarro Mill which was located at the mouth of the Navarro River where it meets the Pacific Ocean. It was one of 20 such mills located along creeks and rivers that were used to move logged Redwoods from the Mendocino hills to the coast and from there to San Francisco where the lumber was used to build the city and other towns and cities to the south. The mill was destroyed by a fire in 1890. By 1913 most of the buildings in Navarro were badly deteriorated and today only a few structures remain in varying condition. Another community (Wendling) 14 miles up the river adopted the name Navarro for their town. This area is now known as Navarro-by-the-Sea.

Structures associated with the inn include a separate one-story building plus two detached cottages and one cottage foundation. All face north towards the Navarro River. Structures surrounding the Mill Manager's House include two barns and two shed structures. All buildings are wood. The two groups of structures are approximately 100 yards apart.

The residence has a designed landscape at the front and sides of the home. A brick path in basket-weave pattern leads to wooden stairs to the front door. To the left of the walk (as you face the house) there is a large *Escallonia fradesii* in the lawn near the road. At the porch is a sambucus, left of that is a fuchcia. Further left is a Shore pine, a clump of *Amarillis beladona* and at the left property line is a Eucalyptus at the road and a large holly hedge setback. An alder is growing behind the house at the base of the slope. A white picket fence that can be seen in historic photos is no longer present.

To the right of the brick walk the planting layout is generally mirrored but with different species. Instead of an escallonia there is a large variegated holly. At

the porch there is another sambucus, 2 rhododendrons, a rose and a fuchsia. Four additional fuchsias (3 varieties) wrap around the right side of the house.

Along the right property line there are 2 pines, 2 large, nicely-formed sycamore, 5 dracaena and a few *Platycodon grandiflorus* ferns. All of the trees and shrubs are planted in lawn that wraps around three sides of the house. There is another large sycamore tree across River Road and the canopies of the sycamore extend over the road. There are a few ornamental plants on the north side of River Road near the barns. Otherwise the vegetation is naturally growing endemic species.

Only the residence and a water tank are on the south side of River Road facing the river. The barns and sheds are to the north between the road and river. The condition of the inn and cottages is severely deteriorated as are the sheds and one of the barns associated with the residence. One barn and the residence are in fair condition.

History: Captain Fletcher was a Scottish sailor and whaling ship Captain who was employed by William Richardson who owned Rancho Albion. Fletcher acquired land at the mouth of the Navarro River from Richardson and later sold a portion of that land to Henry B. Tichenor and Robert G. Byxbee for a mill. Fletcher used the proceeds from the sale to build himself a larger, 2-story house.

Henry B. Tichenor and Robert G. Byxbee built the first sawmill on the site in 1861. They continued to own and operate the mill until 1890. Captain Fletcher's Inn was built ca. 1865 and was in continuous operation for 140 years closing in the mid 1970s. The inn witnessed the build up and decline of the town of Navarro. The first wharf at this site was constructed in 1868. By 1870 the inn complex included a store, saloon, boarding house, stable, blacksmith shop and a storeroom. The mill and the inn were booming through the 1880s but an economic downturn in 1893 ultimately resulted in the sale of the mill and consolidation of the inn complex.

The second Navarro Mill Company was owned by R.G. Byxbee, Calvert Meade and J. Fessenden Clark. They milled railroad ties, shingles and posts and would ship to order. Their office was at 42 Market Street in San Francisco.

The third wharf built in 1893 lasted until 1898. There was also a breakwater at this time known as the Fletcher breakwater. At its peak, prior to 1890 there were over 50 buildings in the town of Navarro plus lumber shoots, wharves and roads.

Fletcher died in 1902 and one of his four children Nellie Fletcher Schaeffer took over management of the inn. The 1906 San Francisco earthquake had a tremendous impact on Navarro leaving only 3 buildings intact including the inn. The Fletcher-Schaeffer house, next to the inn, burned down in 1913.

A bridge was built across the Navarro River in 1908 and for the first time connected the north and south coasts.

The Inn was owned and operated by Maggie Gilmore (1923 – 1931), and Frank and Effie Benkleman/Linn (1931 – 1944). Five guest cottages were constructed in the 1930s and 40s. It was owned by George and Mable Sholin from 1944 – 1948. By 1947 the inn was known as Navarro-By-the Sea Vacation Resort and was a popular tourist destination that attracted fishermen. They promoted steelhead, salmon and ocean fishing. From 1948 – 1959 R.Q. and Vera McCorkle and W.I. Wulk were the proprietors. They added a bar in 1948. You could rent a cabin, stay in the hotel, rent a boat and eat in the dining room. There were four additional owners prior to the property being purchased by the State in 1996.

Today the inn, mill manager's home, barns and other remaining structures are part of Navarro River Redwoods State Park. The inn was designated as a "Save American's Treasures" project in 1999. Preservation efforts are underway and are being funded by the California Cultural & Historical Endowment (CCHE).

Navarro River Redwoods State Park extends inland in a narrow corridor along route 128 to the town of Navarro and includes the Paul M. Dimmick Campground. The Navarro River forms the southern boundary of the park. The park consists primarily of dense, towering redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*), Bay (*Umbellularia californica*) along the river, and an understory of oxalis, sword fern, chain fern, aralia and unfortunately, poison oak.

Note: A detailed history with historic photographs by Dr. Hillary Adams prepared in 2003 for the Save America's Treasures application can be found at www.Navarro-by-the-sea-center.org

Sources: The Early Days of Point Arena by Steve Oliff and Cheri Carlstedt, published by Olyoptics, 2005.

Historic Spots in California by Mildred Brooke Hoover, Hero Eugene Rensch and Ethel Grace Rensch, Third edition revised by William N. Abeloe, Stanford University Press, 1966.

Navarro-By-The-Sea-Center website, particularly the history by Dr. Hillary Adams, 2003

Interpretive material posted at the site.

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Historian: Chris Pattillo, Landscape Architect, October 4, 2009
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Two-story inn with bar addition in front and second detached building to the right; cottages are to the left (Chris Pattillo, October 18, 2009).



Mill and inn keeper's residence approximately 100 yards east of the inn surrounded on three sides with ornamental plants with water tank to the left of the house (Chris Pattillo, October 18, 2009).